A Single Decision (Take Two)

By: Timewatch (/u/1698214/Timewatch) (https://www.fanfiction.net/pm2/post.php?uid=1698214)

Follow/Fav

Aboard Invisible Hand, on that fateful day above Coruscant, Grievous makes a choice that causes a few little changes for the Separatists and Republic alike. [rewrite of a much older story]

Rated: Fiction T (https://www.fictionratings.com/) - English - Sci-Fi/Friendship - General Grievous, OC - Chapters: 53 - Words: 542,002 - Reviews: 1,397 (/r/11714223/) - Favs: 1,321 - Follows: 1,431 - Updated: Aug 19, 2022 - Published: Jan 4, 2016 - id: 11714223

Chapter 20

Khan was a tactical droid unlike any other tactical droid Esera had ever encountered. Not that she'd encountered many, personally, but she'd heard stories of uncompromising rigidity and single-mindedness that only a droid could possess. Khan had neither. And what was more, the droid seemed to have a basic understanding of what made people tick, a notion that made Esera uneasy.

"Tell me, Lieutenant Voyan and Esera Komara," spoke the droid when they boarded his command ship, "what is your experience with infiltration?"

"I'm a mechanic, sir," Voyan said as they made their way through the ship. "I have no experience in infiltration."

"I've sneaked into a few places in my time," Esera said, forcing herself to take bigger steps so that she wouldn't fall behind the two. "A lot of it is just looking like you belong. Put on a safety vest and datapad and most people won't even question you."

"Precisely," said Khan, raising a mechanical finger. "Tell me, Lieutenant Voyan and Esera Komara, what happens in spaceports?"

"Import and export?" Esera asked.

"Rest and recreation," Voyan said, yawning.

"Precisely," said Khan. "Where spacers gather, intoxication, inebriation, prostitution, and debauchery follow." Esera was so startled she nearly choked on her own breath. *I never expected a droid to bring this subject up,* she thought. "I have a project related to this, which I have been developing on my own initiative. But I am in need of organic consultation."

"I'm no stranger to intoxication and inebriation, sir," Voyan said.

Esera rolled her eyes. So, Voyan was one of *those* types. Then again, so had her master, by all outwards appearances...

"First we must stop in the Raxus system. You will find materials for your Vulture droids on Raxus Prime, and Esera Komara has business on Raxus Secundus," said Khan. "I too have business in the capital."

Whatever Khan's project was, Esera had no interest in it. For all she knew, the droid might have been planning into going into organized crime after the Confederacy's imminent-at-the-time defeat, as that's how things had looked then. In no universe did Esera ever intend to get involved in such sordid business.

Khan's raiding force was no invasion fleet. His flagship was a DH-Omni supply ship, which did no actual fighting, and instead supported the rest of the flotilla. A few dozen of *Recusants* and *Munificents* were the backbone of Khan's raiders, but the real workers of the fleet were the assorted vessels the droid had gathered. Esera noted a captured *Arquitens,* several ramshackle ships of obscure design that looked like they'd once belonged to pirates, and another dozen innocent-looking merchant freighters that no doubt were hiding a whole slew of weapons. The warships were for dealing with convoys, the freighters undertook singular operations. Esera doubted there was enough firepower to take on Zygerria, let alone the whole corporate sector. *I've got my work cut out for me,* she thought.

Down on Raxus, she met with her two organic friends in the galaxy: the Sephi sisters. Lirka and Sirka were delighted to host her again. Esera only spent a day on the surface, but in that day the sisters instilled more 'traditional' womanly knowledge in her mind than she'd received in a lifetime with the Jedi. She considered it an accelerated university-level course on how to properly care for her new clothes, how to actually wear them, what kind of makeup went with them, levels of formality in the context of formal occasions, color theory, and most embarrassingly, when to use her *feminine wiles,* which was a field Esera had no experience in and didn't understand at all. Esera had always considered herself a good note-taker though, so she wasn't worried about information overload. She returned to Khan's ship not long after he did, though with a lot more luggage than she'd gone down with.

"Is this mission-relevant material, Esera Komara?" asked the droid.

"Yes," said Esera. "Was *your* business mission-relevant?"

"No," said Khan.

Esera blinked, caught too off-guard to reply before the droid marched off down the corridor. *At least he's honest,* she thought.

They picked up Voyan from Raxus Prime, the junkyard capital of the galaxy, who came back with two repulsor-sled's worth of scrap copper, power converters, capacitors, and durasteel plates. He had dark bags under his eyes, and was as pale as a ghost.

"You look tired," Esera said when she passed him on the way to the hangar.

"There's no time to sleep," he muttered. Esera wasn't surprised to find him passed out in one of the supply ship's hangars, watched by a curious flock of vulture droids in various states of repair. They all seemed to glare at Esera when she came too close. A blurry memory from her early days on Stalimur surfaced: a large, long-necked bird flapping its wings and hissing at her. Esera decided to keep her distance.

"Yeah, I found him," she told Khan on her comlink. "He fell asleep fixing the fighters."

"A dedicated soldier of the Confederacy," Khan said. "But even the most dedicated organic must rest."

"What should we do with him?" asked Esera. By the looks of it, Voyan did nothing but work on his droids. It was incredible to think he was the only one doing this. Didn't he have assistants, droid or otherwise?

"Let him sleep," said Khan. "Organics are creatures of cycles, and those cycles should not be interrupted. I will gladly exchange a delay in repairs to my fighters if it means having competent organics."

"How very pragmatic," Esera said.

"I am a realist," the droid told her. That was the end of that conversation. Khan was a most peculiar droid. Voyan was coming off as a peculiar man. And Esera knew she was a peculiar woman. *We were all made for each other,* she thought, frowning at the idea. *What do I do with Voyan?* The vulture droids continued to glare, so Esera decided to leave him where he was. He'd get up eventually.

Esera spent the rest of her day in the sparse cabin she'd been given, studying up on the Zygerrians and Corporate Sector. She'd have liked to continue the work on the Sith holocrons, but Grievous wasn't letting those out of his sight. In fact, he hadn't let her near those at all since her unfortunate run-in with Ahsoka... He was serious about keeping her away from the dark side.

In the 'morning,' or rather when the current shift of droids retired for maintenance and recharging, Khan summoned Esera and Voyan to the medbay. The mechanic was looking better now, the shadows under his eyes had receded, though not vanished. "I don't know what you're trying to prove, fixing those fighters by yourself," Esera said to him. "There's an army of droids on this ship."

"Do you want to work with Commerce Guild-programmed droids?" asked Voyan, a carefully neutral look on his face.

"Do I?"

"My job is keep the fighters working. Their job is to deliver bigger bills to Raxus. They're mutually exclusive goals." Voyan turned away, back to observing Khan, who was fiddling with a display. Beyond them all was what seemed to be a bacta tank, but completely polarized.

I can't believe the Confederacy is run so poorly, Esera reflected. *How the hell did we- did the Republic not win this war in the first three months? Are things this bad behind the Republic's lines?*

"Thank you for coming," Khan suddenly spoke. "I have brought you here for consultation. I am not an organic, I do not fully understand organic logic... or lack thereof. In my fourteen month career as a commerce raider, I have come to rely on a network of organic spies spread through all the major trade hubs of the galaxy. But organic loyalties change so easily." There was an almost sad intonation to his words. Khan was dangerously close to sounding like he had spirit. "I came to the conclusion that the ideal spy is one who cannot be turned against you. Do you agree?"

"Sure," said Esera. Voyan nodded silently.

"That is precisely what I have set out to create." Khan fiddled with the panel, and the lights in the medbay dimmed down to nearly nothing. Then, the bacta tank unpolarized. Inside, floating in something that definitely wasn't bacta, was a skeleton. A metallic skeleton, with half-grown muscles wrapping around it, staring at them with empty eye sockets, toothless mouth agape, a bundle of wires and tubes plugged into where its belly might have been, like some nightmarish umbilical chord. The two living beings in the room tensed up, Esera could feel Voyan's discomfort in the force.

"Behold," said Khan, "the genesis of my perfect spy."

"That's not a person in there, is it?" asked Esera, her stomach twisting at the grotesque sight.

"What is a person, Esera Komara?" Khan asked her. "How do you define a person? This creature began as a lifeless duranium skeleton, but when she is complete, she will be indistinguishable from you."

"She, huh," muttered Voyan, leaning over and tilting his head. "You planning on making her... completely accurate?"

Of course he goes off asking about that, Esera thought, giving the mechanic a disdaining look.

"I am," said Khan, clasping his hands together. "She is an experiment in biomechanical engineering, the likes of which are seldom seen in the galaxy. Her neural net is learning and growing as we speak. She will have a heartbeat, and lungs, and a stomach, all to fuel her biochemical powerplant. She will have real nerves, and real skin, and real hair. Organic bodies are a tangle of accidental brilliance and hack-jobbed solutions that have barely worked for the past ten million years. Yet, you carry on..." Khan shook his head, in a too-real mimicry of incredulity. "I would pray that I could give this child a soul, if I believed there were anything to pray to."

Esera took a few moments to absorb everything this tactical droid turned mad scientist had sprung upon them. "This is illegal, you know," she finally said, in a faint voice. "Every civilized world has laws against creating this kind of artificial life." Khan put his hands behind his back, and leaned forward, looming over her in a very Grievous-like way.

"There it is: *civilized.* A by-word for the Republic, among its citizens. The Republic has spawned countless clones, each of whom is alive and full of dreams and hopes and desires as you, former Jedi Knight Esera Komara," Khan said. At the very mention of her ex-Jedi status, Voyan gave her a very curious look. He spoke on: "They were born to die, to sacrifice what little time was given to them, for the good of an institution they will never experience. This child of mine will be born to live, to see the galaxy and learn all she can. Tell me, who is more civilized?"

Blaming me for the Republic's evils, as usual, thought Esera, clenching her left fist, as her right fist wouldn't quite close all the way. *Why don't I just take responsibility for everything? Just put it all on my shoulders, everyone else is!* "I make no excuse or defense for the Republic, Khan," Esera said, trying to keep the anger out of her voice. "I left the Republic and the Jedi for a reason."

"Biodroids, rogue Jedi... Should I start looking for the return of the Sith?" asked Voyan, who had retreated into a bland neutrality that he thought betrayed nothing. But Esera could feel his discomfort in the Force easily.

"You're thirteen years late for that, Lieutenant," Esera said. She let those words sink in on Voyan as she turned her attention back to the droid. "What makes you think this is going to work? You're a one-machine operation on a glorified pirate ship."

"Precisely," said Khan. "I have everything I need already, from three medical frigates I captured. What I do not know, I can find. What I do not have, I can buy. Or take. This is, as you put it, a glorified pirate ship."

"Do you really think Grievous is going to let you do this?"

"As ornery and cantankerous as he may be, the General has never punished initiative," said Khan. "In fact, his worst defeats have been the result of subordinates who failed to take the initiative."

Ornery and cantankerous! Grievous will love *to hear that,* Esera thought. "You're still playing mad scientist in my eyes, Khan."

"And you are on your way to play diplomat. That makes two actors aboard this ship." Khan looked over at Voyan, who seemed hopelessly lost now. "Lieutenant, do you have anything you'd like to share, while we're having this heart-to-heart talk, as it were?"

Voyan looked surprised to have been addressed, and took a moment to think. "I told Teya I delivered her note to Maryan. I didn't. If she wanted to ask him to the dance, she could have done it herself." He stared off into the distance, before straightening up. "It was a long time ago. Secondary school."

"A damning secret, to be sure," Khan said, hands clasped. "Now that we all have blackmail material on each other, let us agree not to speak of these things to outsiders. Do you find that fair?"

"Whatever," sighed Esera. "You can do your weird little project. Just remember, people aren't things, and if you make a person, she's not going to stay on a chain forever."

"I won't speak of it, sir," Voyan said.

"So why do you need our consultation?" asked Esera. "It seems you've already got a plan."

"I am undecided on what her final external appearance will be. There are many factors that influence a human's appearance, and some like bone shape and general musculature are too late to change. But other factors, such as subcutaneous fat, skin cell melanin count, and so on, are some time away from implementation in their equivalent forms. My task for you two is to consider what the perfect spy would look like."

"Old and unremarkable," said Esera.

"Young and alluring," said Voyan. The two looked at each other; Esera narrowed eyes.

"What kind of spying are we talking about?" asked Esera to Khan. "Because what I recommend is best for passive spying. I think Lieutenant Voyan has more fantastic scenarios in mind."

"General Khan said that he gets his information from spaceports," Voyan said. "That means he's got people talking to spacers. Spacers are a lot more willing to share things with someone beautiful than someone not. I'm not sure this is something celibate zealots raised in a cloistered temple would understand."

Esera bristled at the remark. "I am *not* a zealot," she said. Though, it was technically true she was celibate. "Are you sure it's not just you who would turn traitor the moment you saw someone attractive?"

"Should a defector be speaking of treason?" asked Voyan, as a hint of anger came through his discomfort in the Force.

"I'll have you know-"

Khan stepped between them before Esera could say more. "I will take your comments under consideration," said Khan. "Lieutenant Voyan is correct in his recollections, my agents engage in active spying. Should I need a passive spy, Esera Komara, I will be more inclined to listen to you. We are now forty-two hours out from Zygerria, and I have fighters that need to be fixed, and a plan to be made. Consider yourselves dismissed."

Invisible Hand arrived at Metalorn just seconds after her her far-younger sister-ship *Morning Star,* flagship of Rear Admiral Ricimer Eemon. The young man had been acting as Grievous's go-between with a certain Clothar Aclinde, the former head of Caramm V's secret police. Aclinde had already arrived on the Techno Union's orbital transfer station. Grievous and Eemon would be meeting him together.

Never before had he been to a full-fledged Techno Union facility. The station's dark colors soothed his eyes, and the high ceilings and wide corridors gave him plenty of room to maneuver if things got hot. In that austere and grim setting, Aclinde blended right in. He was a pudgy, bored-looking middle-aged man, bearded like every Carammite man Grievous had met. Aclinde barely raised an eyebrow when he saw the infamous cyborg, but his expression lit up when he saw Eemon.

"Ah, Ricimer, my boy! How long has it been?" Aclinde rushed forward to clasp the hands of his former boss's son.

"Mister Aclinde," said Eemon, smiling enthusiastically. "I do believe I haven't seen you since I was a kid!"

"Yes, it's been quite a while. You were a head shorter, then. How's old Ado handling things without me?"

"Less subtly, I'd say," Eemon answered. "Mister Aclinde, this is General Grievous, as I'm sure you know. We're in dire need of your help."

"I presume Eemon has informed you of everything?" asked Grievous, staring down at the man.

"Oh, he has," said Aclinde, leaning backwards so he could keep meet Grievous's stare. "It's quite a situation our Confederacy is in, General. Riddled with traitors, spies, and saboteurs... I'm so excited to begin my work." He spoke as if he'd just been given a job to process bureaucratic forms, but the twinkle in his eyes suggested he really was excited.

"I have been told you have experience in dealing with such scum."

"Since I was a young man, in the service of old Ado," said Aclinde, looking wistfully out the vast viewport of the station. "I do miss home, sometimes. The poisoned air, the storms of ash and dust, skeleton forests... Ah, what a time it was."

Grievous turned to Eemon, who wore a pained smile. "My father's conquest of the planet had some collateral damage," Eemon said in a strained voice.

"Skeleton forest?" Grievous asked.

"You see, General," Aclinde began, launching right into an explanation, "Caramm had been split into a dozen nation-states, since the fall of the Sith Empire a thousand years ago. But one day, a great man came along, and decided that time had come for Caramm to rise again. Sacrifices were made along way."

"Yes, sacrifices," said Eemon. "My father's armies could hold the cities and the roads, but not anything more. In the end, there was no way to control the hostile countrysides of these nations, so he simply destroyed the countrysides. I don't think there's a single green thing left out beyond the walls of the cities, besides lichens and mosses... The soil will be poisoned for generations to come." The young man's usual smug smile had faltered as he spoke. "That's why they call it them skeleton forests, there's nothing left but bleached trunks and branches sticking out of the ash fields."

"Impressive," said Grievous, convinced that he'd heard this story before. Probably from Ado Eemon himself at some point, he'd met the man once. "Aclinde, I am expecting the same ruthlessness from you. Make the traitors rue the day they took Republic coin."

A bell chimed, and a lift arrived at their level of the station. Out came two Techno Union officials, no doubt sent by Tambor to welcome them to Metalorn. "It will be a festival of violence, General," said Aclinde, rubbing his hands together.

Esera and Voyan were ushered out of the medbay. They gave each other a mutually icy parting glance before going their own ways. *What did I ever do to him?* Esera wondered, before remembering he'd been in the mess hall on *Invisible Hand* for her story-time with Dofine and the others. *Ah, right, sympathy for the enemy. I am the enemy, in fact. No wonder he doesn't like me.* It was a strange galaxy Esera lived in, when empathy was frowned upon by all. *Could it be that they're right? Are strength and power the only things that really matter?* Esera remembered an incident early in the war, when her master had talked Separatist-backed rebels into agreeing to a ceasefire, and then foiled the Loyalist attempt to betray the ceasefire while they had the element of surprise. The way the rest of the galaxy would have handled that would have only resulted in more useless bloodshed. *No,* she decided, *it's everyone else who is wrong!*

But, Esera reflected when she got back to her quarters, she was one person. A seventeen year old girl trying to keep her head above the metaphorical ocean of trouble around her. What all did she have to deal with now? The elusive Sith lord, Sidious, had been until very recently pulling strings at the highest levels of the Galactic Republic, and Esera was the key to figuring out his game through Dooku's holocrons. General Grievous, notorious madman and murderer, was a borderline-lobotomized weapon of mass destruction without a handler trying to figure out who he really was, and Esera was his only guide. And now she was hurdling towards a vile nest of slavers at many times the speed of light, and she alone could bring them to heel without a planetary massacre.

"Have I gone mad, R8?" she asked her astromech companion. He beeped noncommittally. Esera flopped down on a meager cot with a thin foam pad for a mattress, a far cry from her suite on Grievous's ships, but a luxury compared to her days with the Jedi. "Is it all too much for one dumb little girl who thought she could save the galaxy?"

R8 whistled in a low tone.

"Yeah, but I suppose I have to at least try. We didn't come all this way just to turn back now, did we?" Esera asked. "It's a simple task. All I have to do is get a culture that has prided itself on being slavemasters for a thousand years to just give up being slavemasters. And I have to do it without glassing the damn place, like that horrible cyborg would. Everyone deserves a chance, right?"

How? That was the question. Strength and power, the two things she liked using the least. If the Zygerrians didn't mend their sordid ways, they *would* be glassed by a vengeful Grievous, and the galaxy would probably be a better place for it, in the long run. It also might bring the Corporate Sector into line without Khan's little fleet needing to fire a single shot.

"Oh right, spies," Esera said out loud. "The Corporate Sector's... corporate sects probably have spies on Zygerria. Why wouldn't they?" she asked R8. His photoceptor blinked between red and blue. "It's what I'd do, always keep an eye on what might be coming up the hyperlanes. We'll need to disrupt communications."

She sat up and brought out a datapad, and started writing. Planning an invasion was one thing, faking one was something else entirely. And she would need to fake it or the slavers would laugh her off the planet. After twelve hours locked in her little cabin, Esera was firmly under the belief Grievous had given her this task to make her see the futility of her Jedi ways. She trudged off to find some food. Surely there'd be *something* on a Trade Federation-built freighter. Esera discovered a prepackaged meal dispenser in this ship's mess hall, with a menu entirely consisting of Nemoidian cuisine. *Better than GAR ration packs!* By the time this war was over, Esera was either going to hate Nemoidian food or be unable to ever get enough of it. She tried to read up on former Prime Minister and current King of Zygerria, Atai Molec, as Nemoidian spices fried her tongue.

Voyan's presence entered her perception at some point, his approach felt faintly through the Force. It wasn't particularly strong in him, Esera noted. She determinedly ignored him for as long as he was in the mess hall, and continued reading about Zygerrian politics. She also checked in with the madmen of the shadowfeed discussion board *m11talk·rax,* posting under name of Esera and her location of Confederate Navy again. That would get her attention.

Give me a rundown on Zygerrians, she asked of them. In the next half-hour, she had a handful of useful replies, giving her perspectives she wouldn't have gotten from archival information.

The only thing Zygerrians hate more than other Zygerrians are aliens, one poster summed up their culture as. *That's why they enslave them, they're too lazy to do the work themselves and won't trust each other to do work either. Watch that Alderaanian documentary about the Zyggerian slave trade.*

That's fake news, don't believe Loyalist disinfo, answered a poster hailing from Vandos. *Only the top 10% of the Empire owned slaves before the war, the rest of us had nothing! Go read Necho Tahnat's abolition papers, Esera, they put him in prison for a reason. He was scheduled for execution but he succeeded in an appeal by combat, no one's sure what's next for him.*

The poster must have been an exile, to have ended up on the remote and mostly-forgotten planet of Vandos. Esera chased the lead he gave her, though. Necho Tahnat was a name that had been carefully scrubbed from history wherever the Zyggerian state had its influence. Esera tracked down his publications on a Corellian non-profit organization's shadowfeed homepage. *Even people in the Republic use Separatist media,* Esera was surprised to find. Was the Holonet really that stiflingly regulated and controlled? She spent the rest of her day reading Tahnat's essays against slavery, which were really essays in favor of autarky and social reformation at home. According to the Zygerrian, he was a free miner driven out of work by slave labor who had turned his tremendous energies to campaigning for sociopolitical change. The idea of *appeal by combat* was fascinating, too, from a purely legal perspective. Esera brought him up to Khan in their strategy meeting.

"So, Tahnat doesn't actually care about the morality of slavery," Esera summarized for him. "He wants an immediate deportation of all aliens, the cessation of reliance on the galactic economy, and a more fair wealth redistribution. Only the Zygerrian elite can afford alien slaves, and they've been promising a trickle-down effect of wealth for generations. Tahnat and the rest of the middle class haven't seen it, and the lower class certainly hasn't either. Zygerria's heyday as a slave-trading hub is over, the Hutts dominate the market and the Zygerrians have no protection from Loyalist privateers, unlike the Hutts. Their deal with Dooku hasn't turned out so great."

"Interesting," Khan said. "How will you exploit this class divide while retaining their loyalty to the Confederacy?"

"I've thought about it," Esera said. "Atai Molec is only king because he took the throne by force. His only legitimacy is through power. I think the only legitimacy on the whole planet is derived from power, their political system is absolute autocracy, where the monarch inherits his or her crown by plucking it off the corpse of the predecessor he or she just killed. This might be a very simple negotiation. I tell King Atai that he can abolish the institution of slavery or we'll back Tahnat in a bid for the throne."

"We would have to get him out of prison, first," said Khan.

"Yeah, we would..." Esera sat back in her chair, hand on chin. "If I had a cloaked ship like Asajj Ventress, I'd just be able to fly right in and break him out before anyone knew he was even relevant."

"Alas, not even I have come across a cloaking device in my fourteen months of operations," Khan said.

"We'll do it the old-fashioned way, then. I'll talk with King Atai and you break Tahnat out."

"I am surprised that a former Jedi Knight has such faith in my droids," said Khan. "But this would constitute an act of aggression against an allied state."

Esera frowned, and watcher her right hand spasm as she tried to flex it. "Right... I'm not Anakin Skywalker, I don't get a free pass to commit whatever crimes I like, do I?"

"No," said Khan. "Our mission is to bring Zygerria into the Confederacy, not drive them over to the Republic. Which would gladly accept them, I calculate, given their friendliness towards the Hutts."

"Fine," said Esera, leaning back in her chair and running a hand through her hair. "Alright. No breaking out Tahnat before negotiations fail. But negotiations won't fail if Atai thinks he's facing greater odds than he really is. On that note, I have an idea..."

It took another few hours to work out the details, and for Khan to talk Lieutenant Voyan into it, but by the end of the next droid shift, they had something that just might work.

"Idiots! Imbeciles! A disgrace to the forces of industry!" Wat Tambor raged at his foremen, so loudly that Grievous would hear it through the wall. He was sputtering with fury when Aclinde and his goons had rounded up his treacherous overseers and engineers.

"As you can see, General, I've been investigating Metalorn on my own for some time now, at Ricimer's behest," said Aclinde, eyeing the traitors and spies bound and forced to their knees before them. Some where Skakoan, some were not. They were all dying either way.

"I was told something was afoot here by one of my men," Grievous said, thinking of that strange little lieutenant he'd sent with Khan and Komara to Zygerria. "He said that the quality control was so bad, it had to be sabotage."

"And so it was," said Aclinde. "Shall I get to work on extracting information from the prisoners?"

"Yes," said Grievous. "See if they can lead us to any other spy rings, or their handlers." He leaned down until his vocoder was by Aclinde's ear. "And when you're done, kill them. But don't let them know their fates have been decided before you have what I want."

"I'm a professional, General," Aclinde said, putting on a pair of gloves. "I'll have them singing all the way to their graves." He turned to his motley collection of thugs and gunmen. "Shutting down the spies is one thing, General. I'll need better agents to stop any more from appearing."

"You will have them," said Grievous.

Wat Tambor emerged from the conference room, trembling with rage. "General, there is no excuse for the shameful negligence of my foremen. This ring was right under their nose for the last two years and they had not a hint. I offer you full use of our torture chamber here to do with as you please."

"Would that suit you, Aclinde?" asked Grievous.

"No," said the man. "Electric currents are painful, but they're not threatening, psychologically. I prefer more... creative methods. Oh, I can hardly wait! I haven't done this in years, not since Ado thought Colonel Salian was plotting against him. He wasn't, mind you, but we had him confessing to conspiracies he hadn't even dreamed of. It helped Ado's peace of mind, you see, he got antsy without someone trying to kill him at least once every year. If you excuse me, sirs, I've got some – ah, what does Republic Intelligence call it? – *enhanced interrogation techniques* to try out."

Tambor and Grievous exchanged a look. "Where did you find this one?" asked Tambor.

"I was told that terror drags you from your bed on Caramm," Grievous said, feeling an immense satisfaction as the traitors were herded to their doom. "I think it's time to export that terror."

Night on Coruscant wasn't all that much different from day, besides the lighting change. Asajj was well-versed with all hours of the Coruscant experience. She'd found a nice quiet balcony at the Jedi Temple to escape from the meddlesome monks. Ahsoka Tano wasn't among their numbers anymore, though, so she felt herself allowed to meddle.

"Is this place what you expected?" she asked Asajj.

"It's not quite so dreary," said Asajj. "I was expecting duracrete walls painted in duracrete grey. Like a prison."

"We... they aren't stupid. No one wants to live in a prison, not even Jedi," said Ahsoka, sitting down next to her. She offered her a datapad. "This is for you."

Asajj read it, and her eyes widened. "A full pardon," she almost whispered, almost not believing what was in her hands. *It's a blank slate,* Asajj thought. *I can do anything I want to do now, go anywhere I want to go... be anyone I want to be.*

"Don't ever say I don't follow through on my promises," said Ahsoka. "Yeah, it's a little late, but better late than never, right?"

"I suppose so," said Asajj. *I actually have a future now...*

"What's next for you?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. What about you?"

"I don't know either." Ahsoka shrugged, and looked at her feet. "The job's done on Mandalore. Maul's in prison somewhere on this planet. It's back to drifting around, I guess. See what good I can do on the sidelines, you know?"

The two sat in silence for a while. *Good, huh?* Asajj wondered. What did she know about doing good? What even was doing good? She had the rest of her life open to her now, maybe it was time to try something new. Maybe. "What's the pay for doing good?" asked Asajj.

"Not great," Ahsoka said. "I'm getting pretty familiar with thrift stores."

I'll pass, this time, Asajj thought. "You handled yourself well on Grievous's ship. A lot better than on Teth."

"Watch it, Ventress."

"I'm just saying, if you want a real job after this, give me a call. It's nice not working with fools."

Author's note:

I meant to have this up earlier in the month, sorry folks, but you know me. I actually cut out another 5000 words of Esera on Zygerria, after I realized just how obscenely long the chapter had gotten. Hopefully that'll be up... uh, when it's up. I'd like to post this arc in a regular manner this summer while I have time. And Asajj and Ahsoka will be bowing out of the story for now, but we haven't seen the last of them. On final note, my mention of time dilation last chapter confused some readers it seems. There's no actual time dilation happening; I mean that some plot arcs would be advancing at speeds faster than others as pacing demanded it. Thus one day has passed on Coruscant in the story, while Grievous and Esera have experienced over a week of events. I wouldn't worry about it if I were you.

< Prev | 20. Chapter 20: Spies and Mad Science | Next >

Name:

Type your review for this chapter here...

Post Review

Actions | Share | Follow/Favorite

Help (/support/) . Cookies (/cookies/) . Privacy (/privacy/) . Terms of Service (/tos/) . Top

(//x.com/fictionpress)

ray id: php-api